

New rules for Chinese medicine	54
Speaking ill of the dead?	54
Mount Sinai's humble past	55
Pulse: Smokers a dying breed	55
News @ a glance	56
A whopping award in NY	56
New medical school delayed	56

Chinese medicine: registration a must in BC

All Chinese medicine practitioners in British Columbia must now be licensed to practise. This is the first registration requirement of its kind in North America.

Years of lobbying led to the creation of the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia in 1996, says college chair Mason Loh, but demand for the licensing system has been driven by patients. "Some people say that bringing a 3000-year-old healing system in line with other health care professions is impossible," he says. "Well, this registration has shown that it can be done."

There are now 4 licensed categories of Chinese medicine in BC: doctor of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), registered TCM practitioner, registered TCM herbalist and registered acupuncturist.

The college is encouraging consumers to report concerns and to find licensed practitioners online (www.ctcma.bc.ca/registrants.htm). There are currently about 900 TCM practitioners in BC — most are acupuncturists — and to be registered they must carry a minimum of \$1 million in malpractice insurance.

Over the past 4 years, about 550 of them have applied for a 1-time, points-based opportunity to obtain licensure in the different categories (the rest will write licensing exams). About half have had their credentials evaluated so far. Applicants must provide proof of education, names of patients and patient-contact information for credentialing purposes.

The college then attempts to verify overseas qualifications, a process registrar Randy Wong calls "horrendous." Adds Wong: "Sometimes it takes years of digging," says Wong.

The college has so far discovered 16 cases of fraudulent credentials, and these applicants were rejected. Some may face prosecution. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*

Was *BMJ* dead wrong to print critical obituary?

Mere hours after an obituary for Dr. David Horrobin appeared in the *British Medical Journal* Apr. 19, *eBMJ*'s rapid-response function was humming. In death as in life, Horrobin — the founder of Scotia Pharmaceuticals and the journal *Medical Hypotheses* — was at the centre of controversy. This time, though, it was the proper role of obituaries in medical journals, and not the relative merits of evening primrose oil, that was at issue.

For even though health journalist Caroline Richmond vouched for Horrobin's "charm, intelligence and straightforwardness," she also wrote that he "may prove to be the greatest snake oil salesman of his age." The obituary described him as "a passionate promoter of evening primrose oil."

BMJ readers were shocked. "The obituary ... was so disappointing and twisted that it has left me with a disturbing feeling of disgust," wrote one of the scores of angry readers. By May 26, a printout of the responses totalled 86 pages.

"I do not know if her snide remarks have any foundation," wrote another. "I do know that it was very ill judged to ask anyone who feels as she did to write an obituary and even more foolish of you to publish it."

More than a month after publication the furor continued, even though Horrobin — who once taught at the University of Montreal — was acknowledged to be a controversial figure. One Scottish paper said that even though many admired his "unwavering commitment to developing new drugs, others were equally moved in the opposite direction by his combative management style."

Richard Smith, the *BMJ* editor, remains unfazed by the outrage.

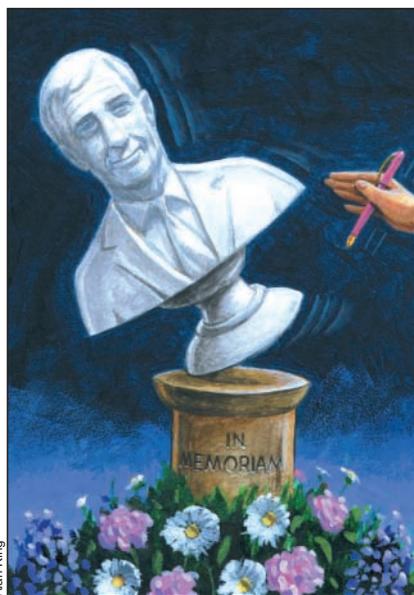
He regrets that some minor inaccuracies slipped into the piece, and wishes he had known before publication that Richmond knew Horrobin. But he welcomes the debate and stands by Richmond's right to assess Horrobin's life in the way she did.

"Medicine has a culture of not speaking ill of the dead," he says. "What quite a lot of our readers want is what I call glorified death notices, but we want serious journalistic pieces that tell stories and do make a judgement on a character. We want more light and shade."

"It's difficult to go against a culture, to move from a world where everybody was wonderful and never put a foot wrong," he adds. "But I'm damned if that means I'm not going to give it a go."

And Richmond remains unapologetic. "The *Lancet*'s obituary, and other obits in the national press, wimpishly parroted the version sent out by Horrobin's former PA [press assistant]."

Asked if she was surprised by the venomous response, Richmond says she realizes now that Horrobin had a cult following, especially among people with chronic fatigue syndrome. "If I'd been as conscious of this as I am now, I would have pre-empted their response as far as I could." — *Naomi Marks, Brighton, UK*



Alan King